

Testimony of Danielle Cornish

Graduate Student at Southern Connecticut State University

in regard to

**H.B. No. 5037- AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING
JUNE 30, 2023.**

Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education

Public Hearing - February 17, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Danielle Cornish, and I am a School Counseling Graduate student at Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven, CT. I am also a part of the Connecticut School Counselor Association and fieldwork at Truman School in New Haven, CT. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding HB5037- An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023. **Specifically, I am here today to testify about the importance of school counselors and the need to fund additional school counselors so that every student has access to a school counselor.**

House Bill 5037 addresses the need to fund additional school counselors so that every student can have access to a school counselor to meet their academic needs, helping their social-emotional essentially provide an equitable education. Specifically, this would require school districts to have at least one school counselor for every 250 students in a school. It also requires boards of education to implement *comprehensive school counseling programs* in their schools and at least 80% of the school counselor's time spent in *direct service* with students according to the national ASCA Model. To increase the level of support for the students.

As human beings, we need connections to influence to gain growth. Often, it takes a School Counselor and student relationship to be present, and it takes time to listen to those small, impactful moments to achieve a surmountable change. This bill is essential to me as a graduate student witnessing in New Haven public school, a school counselor dealing with a students' overwhelming need to have a well-rounded opportunity to adjust to their own social, emotional, behavioral, and academics. Currently, I am witnessing the challenges first-hand that a school counselor faces every day from being in a constant reactive mode rather than proactive mode. Due to primarily a caseload of 520 students, there is only one school counselor for this K-8 school and exacerbated by the COVID-19 impact.

Specifically, implementing the comprehensive framework with a maximum caseload of 1:250 for students would allow for necessary responsive services for meeting mental health needs and essential prevention work, particularly in social and emotional learning. Further, to have consistent and equitable guidance toward students' present and future endeavors. School counselors are a critical resource for staff members and provide support to combat the pandemic's effects on their students' academic and mental health needs.

Connecticut ranks 37th in the country for average counselor-to-student ratios; as of 2018-2019, C.T.'s average ratio is 1:457. There is a lack of access to school counselors. Not all schools have counselors; only 25% of our elementary schools have counselors; students don't have access due to high caseloads, or counselors are frequently split among several schools. These are staggering statistics showing the short-sighted effects of how thinly spread between constant demands of discipline referrals, truancy, emotional and financial hardships for what our students face in and outside of school.

I am strongly fostering your support of H.B. No. 5037- an act is adjusting the state budget, so our students' future can have options and opportunities to access a comprehensive program and equitable access to a School Counselor in Connecticut. I would ask that the appropriations committee consider appropriating money specifically for school counseling, and hiring more school counselors is vital to our children's future in CT.

In closing, the pandemic's impact is showing its long-term effects. We are responsible for turning the tide to thrive for building a new mindset toward well-rounded, competent, socially, emotionally future solid leaders. Our position evokes our responsibilities to assist the school, parents, and community. Just remember, the hurt adult once was an at-risk traumatized student only looking for a new promise.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Danielle Cornish

Contact information: cruzd1@southernct.edu, 203-522-2559